

S.C. Department of Corrections Embraces Worksite Wellness Initiative

Issue

After speaking to the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's (DHEC) Region 3 Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention (HDSP) staff, the S.C. Department of Corrections (DOC) Wellness Coordinator realized her employees' poor eating habits, absence of physical activity, and lack of knowledge of family medical history. This large state agency, with more than 28 institutions across the state, has several thousand employees. Realizing the immediate need for promotion of healthier lifestyles, the DOC Wellness Coordinator invited HDSP staff to speak at a staff meeting.

The statistics are staggering:

- In 2006, South Carolina had the fourth worst overweight and obesity rate in the nation;
- More than 54 percent of adults in our state are irregularly active or inactive; and
- Cardiovascular disease is South Carolina's leading killer for both men and women, among all racial and ethnic groups.

Intervention

DHEC Region 3 partnered with S.C. Department of Corrections in Columbia, SC, to increase knowledge about heart disease and stroke prevention. A DHEC employee presented at a DOC staff meeting at the agency's main facility campus, and provided a presentation to 37 participants, which focused on:

- Recognizing the warning signs of stroke and heart attacks;
- Healthy eating and nutrition;
- Knowing your family medical history; and
- The importance of physical activity.

Impact

Participation in this event was a huge success. Bringing the program into the institution to employees and possibly, in the future, to inmates, would significantly reduce the health disparities in the population. Successes of this initiative include:

- Within two weeks after the staff meeting, employees began bringing healthy food to work for lunch;
- The staff meeting menu changed from foods such as fried chicken and macaroni and cheese to healthy options such as fruit and salads;
- The agency is interested in pursuing a policy change regarding foods / meals for staff meetings; and
- The DOC has asked DHEC to provide additional staff training at various other facilities and possibility to the inmate population through a train-the-trainer method.

Contact: Karol Rembert, LSMW,
S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control - Region 3
(803) 576-2888; REMBERK@dhec.sc.gov